

she is being very frank with me
she says
she thought poetry was supposed
to be beautiful
she's embarrassed by my writing
she's ashamed to show my books
to her friends
& she never knows what to say
when someone asks what I'm doing
& my father's cholesterol count is
down to normal
& he's back on the beer
the gout hasn't bothered him
in months
& I can hear him belching & wheezing
into the phone
on another extension
& my mother scolding him
say something to your son, Albert
it's thanksgiving
he's 3000 miles away
& there are a few minutes of
strained football talk
some jokes about the catholic church
& my mother's pumpkin pie
& finally the inevitable silence
the four of us listening to
cross country static.

well, I guess I better go
my mother says
this is costing us
& then the three in chorus
wishing me a happy thanksgiving.

TWO GENERALS

this old woman lives across the street
she wears an army surplus overcoat
when she walks her dog
walks him all hours of the day
never stays out long
dresses the dog in fancy sweaters
carries him in her arms
when another dog comes near
lets him crap in this
patch of grass
right under my window
she acts a bit like a maniac
a movie maniac
she could be Peter Lorre's wife
& she's always looking around
looking over her shoulder
when she walks him

like it's some great adventure
some perilous mission
& when the dog is finished she
scoops up his shit
on a neatly folded paper towel
& carries it to the street
places it oh so carefully
into the gutter
like maybe it's an abandoned baby
on a church doorstep
or some kind of bomb
& then she marches back
across the street
lock stepping with the dog
a couple of generals
home from the wars.

CUSTER'S LAST STAND

baby, we have to cut this out
I mean, it's getting to be like
Custer's last stand
around here
& you've got so many horses
so many arrows you're
shooting my way
like why don't we ever go out
& why don't I cut down on the drinking
& why do I have to stay up all night.

but it's always like this
when I'm writing
you know that
the poet's isolation is not a
romantic myth
& like Custer I've gathered
my wagons & my cavalry
all about me
closing myself off
from all those Indians out there.

& listen it's bad enough
knowing I'm not going to win
knowing they'll get to me
soon enough
so please baby hang on
just a little longer
these poems I write they
aren't bullets & they won't
make those Indians go away

but they will help me to stand tall
& look those bastards in the eye
when they come in for the kill.